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Gov. Gregoire Proclaims Statewide Wildfire Emergency

OLYMPIA – Governor Chris Gregoire today proclaimed a state of emergency for all 39 Washington counties due to a number wildfires burning across the state, as well as a concern for the availability of resources to deal with a severe and escalating fire season.

“I am taking this step as a precaution,” said Governor Gregoire. “Current wildfires need to be contained, but at the same time, we are looking at weather forecasts that project the possibility of more wildfires for some time to come.”

The proclamation further details the potential threat from significant fires to citizens and property around the state, including homes, businesses, public facilities, utilities and natural resources, describing the situation as “extreme.” Wildfire fighting resources are scarce throughout the state, region and nation due to ongoing and projected fire fighting efforts throughout the United States.

Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste authorized the activation of the State Fire Services Mobilization Plan on July 13 to support fire fights in Benton and Klickitat counties and on July 16 for the Tunk Grade Fire in Okanogan County. The Mobilization Plan allows the state to utilize personnel, equipment and other resources from around the state when wildfires exceed the firefighting capacity of local jurisdictions.

Governor Gregoire’s proclamation directs state government to support emergency response activities across the state, which allows state agencies to make expenditures and use resources to assist in firefighting and emergency response efforts.

In addition, the proclamation authorizes the Adjutant General of Washington, Major General Tim Lowenberg, to mobilize into Active Duty those portions of the Washington National Guard and the Washington State Guard as coordinated and requested by the State Fire Marshall’s Office. The National Guard is typically called out when other resources have been expended.

In preparation for this year’s wildland fire season, Governor Gregoire signed legislation authorizing the Guard to conduct fire mobilization training to enhance response capacity.

Some 300 citizen-soldiers of the Washington National Guard recently completed this training last month.

State actions are coordinated through the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at Camp Murray near Tacoma. Operated by the Emergency Management Division (EMD) of the Washington Military Department, the State EOC is staffed 24 hours a day throughout the year.

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